



February 12, 2015

PSBA Legislative Report

[More Info](#)

The House of Representatives was in session this week. The Senate will return to Harrisburg next Tuesday, Feb. 17, and the House will return on Monday, Feb. 23.

Top Stories

- * **PSBA Testifies in Support of Bill to End Keystone Exams as Graduation Requirement**
- * **Gov. Wolf Proposes Gas Severance Tax Plan to Fund Education**

Latest News

- * **House Adopts School Financial Reporting Bill**
- * **House Panel Approves Property Tax Reduction Proposal**
- * **Members Sought for PSBA Platform Committee**
- * **On the Hill: Upcoming Meetings**

Top Stories

PSBA Testifies in Support of Bill to End Keystone Exams as Graduation Requirement

This week PSBA presented testimony to the House Education Committee in support of [House Bill 168](#) (Rep. Tobash, R-Schuylkill), which would remove the use of the Keystone Exams as a high school graduation requirement; and [House Bill 177](#) (Rep. Grove, R-York), which would establish an Academic Standards Commission to study and offer recommendations to the General Assembly, Department of Education and State Board of Education concerning the PA Core Standards.

Representing the association was 2015 PSBA President William LaCoff and John Callahan, PSBA's director of government affairs. LaCoff agreed that the use of Keystone Exams should be modified to lessen their high-stakes impact, and noted that relevant research shows there is no scientific basis to rely on high-stakes tests for granting a diploma. He discussed many of the negative consequences of high stakes testing and said that such testing reinforces inequity, particularly among low-income and minority students.

LaCoff also urged the committee to consider the financial impact of the program, and voiced support for the elimination of seven additional Keystone Exams, which would be an expensive process for the state as well as local districts. The association also called for the elimination of the time-consuming and expensive project-based assessments (PBA) that must be used for students who do score proficient on a Keystone

Exam, or who were opted-out of taking the exams for religious reasons. LaCoff said that if the requirement for Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement is eliminated, there is no need to continue the requirement for completion of PBAs.

PSBA also voiced support for House Bill 177 because it provides an avenue for further public review of the PA Core Standards and an opportunity to suggest adjustments if necessary. However, the association emphasized that school districts have already invested much time and money in efforts to develop and implement curriculum frameworks, materials and resources for teachers and administrators. The association noted that it would be difficult, time-consuming and expensive for districts to reverse directions and that changes to the standards will require further adjustments by school districts, creating the need for additional time and increased funding. [Click here to read the text of PSBA's testimony.](#)

Gov. Wolf Proposes Gas Severance Tax Plan to Fund Education

This week Gov. Tom Wolf proposed plan to enact a severance tax on natural gas extraction, with funds to be dedicated for public education. The proposal, called the Pennsylvania Education Reinvestment Act, would enact a 5% severance tax plus 4.7 cents per thousand feet of volume on extraction, which is estimated to generate over a billion dollars in fiscal year 2017 prior to exemptions. The proposal would continue the payments made to impacted communities and make exemptions for: gas given away for free; gas from low producing wells; and wells brought back into production after not having produced marketable quantities of gas. It would also contain provisions to protect property owners who lease land for natural gas exploration. The plan is modeled on West Virginia's severance tax plan. The proposal would have to be introduced as legislation and approved by the General Assembly, and while Democrats have generally expressed support, Republicans have raised concerns with components of the plan. [Click here to read the governor's news release.](#)

Latest News

House Adopts School Financial Reporting Bill

The House unanimously passed [House Bill 224](#) (Rep. Christiana, R- Beaver), which is the re-introduction of the SchoolWATCH legislation from the previous session and would make permanent the school financial reporting feature unveiled this month by the Department of Education on the School Performance Profiles (SPP) website. The site provides extensive fiscal data of public schools, including traditional school districts, charter and cyber charter schools, and comprehensive career and technology centers. The report includes information on schools' total expenditures and revenues, including per-pupil expenditures and expenditures for various budget categories. PSBA supports this bill, which will now go to the Senate for consideration.

House Panel Approves Property Tax Reduction Proposal

This week the House Finance Committee approved [House Bill 147](#) (Rep. Maloney, R-Berks), would allow for the elimination of residential school property taxes via the homestead exclusion. The bill proposes to amend the state Constitution by modifying the Uniformity of Taxation Clause and changing the ability of a taxing authority to move the exemption from 50% of the median assessed value to 100% of the assessed value of each homestead property within a local taxing jurisdiction. The state Constitution does not exempt property from real estate taxation; however, it does permit the General Assembly to grant exemptions within specific guidelines. An amendment to the Constitution approved by the voters in November 1997 added the exemption from the uniformity clause allowing an exclusion level of 50% of the median assessed value.

Members Sought for PSBA Platform Committee

Are you interested in serving on the PSBA Platform Committee? PSBA Regional Directors are now selecting two school directors from their areas to serve. The Platform Committee will meet on **Saturday**,

Aug. 8, 2015 at PSBA offices in Mechanicsburg to draft a proposed platform for 2016 that will receive final consideration by the Delegate Assembly on Tuesday, Oct. 13 in conjunction with the School Leadership Conference in Hershey. **Anyone interested in being considered for an appointment must contact their PSBA regional director; [click here](#) for contact information.**

On the Hill: Upcoming Meetings

Upcoming events currently scheduled include:

Tuesday, March 3

* Gov. Wolf will be presenting his first state budget proposal before a joint meeting of the Senate and House of Representatives. PSBA will be providing members with complete coverage of the governor's 2015-16 spending plan, including reports that day and a complimentary webcast briefing on March 4 by Acting Education Secretary Pedro Rivera.

Budget Hearings

- * **Monday, March 16** -- The House Appropriations Committee will meet with the Department of Education.
- * **Monday, March 23** -- The Senate and House Appropriations Committees will conduct separate hearings with the Public School Employees Retirement System.
- * **Monday, March 30** -- The Senate Appropriations Committee will meet with the Department of Education.

Register Now for PSBA's Advocacy Forum, April 19-20!

Plan to attend PSBA's Advocacy Forum, April 19-20. Day One of the event includes sessions at PSBA offices in Mechanicsburg with legislators, Acting Education Secretary Pedro Rivera, staff from the National School Boards Association and special guest (via Skype) Diane Ravitch. Day Two is at the Capitol in Harrisburg. [Click here to see the agenda and speakers, and to register.](#)